

ICPS newsletter®

Ukraine needs everyday democracy

In an interview in the "Tribune" section of Biznes, a Ukrainian weekly, ICPS Director Volodymyr Nikitin draws attention to the lack of key institutions and processes in Ukraine that are necessary for it to develop. The country still does not have everyday democracy, a proper leadership has not been formed, and there are no true statesmen. Nor has the opportunity to improve things been made good yet. Mr. Nikitin says that if the state is unable to nurture real leaders, the private sector can take up the challenge and work for the development of its country

St. Luke, a prominent surgeon and priest whose grave is in Crimea, wrote once that humans think with their heart. It is also important for people to think about Ukraine not just with their minds, but also with their hearts.

Everyday democracy

The first thing that needs to change in Ukraine is its lame democracy. Ukraine has developed all the institutes of representative government, but everyday democracy is still missing. Ukrainian politicians have become accustomed to a situation where they can re-distribute power and extend it to the local level. But in a democratic society, the main task for an official is to serve the public. For Ukrainian politicians, the idea of this "true purpose" is stressful, indeed.

As long as the top-down soviet machine is in place and working, Ukrainians will not be able to establish everyday democracy in their society. Whereas the interests of only one group, the Communist Party nomenclature, were legitimate in the Soviet Union, nowadays, various organized groups have equal rights and are entitled to defend their interests. But Ukraine's politicians have not been taught how to deal with such a situation.

In the Western World, this system is well developed and is called "public policy." This means Ukraine need not reinvent the wheel in order to establish everyday democracy for itself. What is really needed are administrative reform and the political will of the country's leadership.

The second thing that Ukrainian society needs is a serious dose of "de-sovietization," as ICPS Honorary Chair Vira Naniivska likes to put it. We have not tried this. Ukrainians have not identified

what the soviet system was, what we were dealing with, and what needs to be changed.

Yet, all this is very clearly formulated in the papers of the soviet secret service. "Sovietization means depriving the population of all possibilities to participate in political life, eradicating private property, and implementing a top-down, totalitarian system of government administration. This is the only ideology and no doubts can be permitted." So far, the Ukrainians have not changed much: they've admitted the public to political life and they've allowed private property.

Ukraine has no intellectual elite

It seems to me that the main threat to Ukraine is Ukraine itself, that is, its internal state. The country does not have an intellectual environment: intelligence, intellectual achievements and an orientation towards developing intelligence are not welcome in Ukraine. Miserly funding is allocated to science and education. If we look at those individuals who carry authority in Ukraine, they are not models of intellectual capacity. This means the country lacks a true elite, and this constitutes one of the most serious dangers for Ukraine.

Ukrainians frequently confuse the idea of an elite with the privileged classes. There are many privileged people in Ukraine who have power and who take positions that would normally be taken by an elite, but they do not fulfill the functions of a true elite.

The elite means those individuals who live according to clear principles, those who safeguard and develop the country's future. The purpose of an elite is to put

By the way...

- From 19 to 23 February 2007, practical consultations on benchmarking and seminars and workshops on potential output took place at ICPS as part of the "Socio-Economic Performance and Potential Analysis Capacity" (SEPPAC) project. Participants included project partners from the Government—the Ministry of Economy, the National Bank of Ukraine, the Ministry of Finance, and Derzhkomstat, the state statistics committee—and those who are implementing this project—experts from ICPS and the Conference Board of Canada (CBoC).

together development programs and to guide the trajectory of the nation's progress. To implement this, we have to adhere to key principles, such as honor and responsibility, which constitute the foundation of European culture.

Missing: European values

Unfortunately, our very real shift away from Europe began back when the bolsheviks first came to power. What is Europe and what is European culture? First of all, this means European thinking and a European outlook. Europe is a unique combination of Greek scholarship, Roman law and Christianity. The combination of these three elements is what made Europe, Europe, and distinguished it from the rest of the world.

One of the main principles underlying European thinking is the division of world into visible and invisible, the world of ideal objects and the world of mundane problems. These two worlds should not be confused, no matter what. Yet, that is precisely what the bolsheviks did. In order to attract the proletariat and bring to life the slogan, "Even a cook can govern a country," they transformed ideal concepts into material things. In general, this is typical of uneducated people: to think that it is possible to touch justice or a nation with your fingers.

Attempts to realize the ideal on the earth have always had bad consequences for the development of that country. In Ukraine,

this led to a situation where most people lost all sense of the “higher universe” completely. Although the churches are the bearers of ideas, principles and values around the world, in Ukraine, they do not entirely fulfill this function.

The Pope may regularly address the faithful with messages that combine Christian ideas with important issues of everyday life, but Ukrainian pastors do not do this. In Ukraine, Christianity amounts to little more than formal rituals, even paganism, for many people. The church frequently brought enlightenment to a society. This function can also be fulfilled by philosophers who explain the essence of life to people.

Unfortunately, there are no such philosophers in Ukraine today. This lamentable fact has its own historical explanation. All the soviet elite and all strategic studies were focused in Moscow. When Ukraine broke away from the Soviet Union, it did not have any world-class theoreticians in many scientific areas.

In a developed country, the elite is actively engaged in global issues, analyzing human development scenarios. The Americans, the Europeans and the Russians all do it... In Ukraine, this activity is largely undeveloped, which means that nobody here even makes an attempt to insert Ukraine into the global arena. At best, Ukrainians are mentioned in foreign scenarios.

Quality education leads to a responsible elite

To carry out this analytical work, the right kind of training is needed, and this must be based on a quality education. Today, education is viewed mainly as a social function in Ukraine. Yet it must fulfill another extremely important function: to prepare individuals who are capable of forming an elite.

To tell the truth, the country needs fundamentally different educational institutions for this purpose, where young people work in small groups under the guidance of authoritative individuals and carry out practical work. Such students must meet special requirements that will make it impossible to be accepted and graduate using personal connections.

In Ukraine, no educational institution, not even the National University of Kyiv–Mohyla Academy, has set such a goal

for itself. Thus, the question is: How will individuals who can think and speak on the basis of principles emerge in Ukraine? “Midwives” are always necessary. In the past, saints played the role of intermediary. What can Ukraine do now?

It makes little sense to expect that people will become saints. Also, it is also unwise to expect that everybody will become an intellectual or take on intellectual functions. However, there should be individuals who will make the link between the two worlds mentioned earlier and lead others.

If the state cannot raise an elite, the private sector can get involved in this process, as happened in Russia. There, a group of oligarchs chipped in US \$5mn each—Roman Abramovich donated US \$26mn—, bought a piece of land close to Moscow, and launched construction of the Moscow School of Management. The country’s elite will be trained in this institution, yet this project was 100% financed by business. There was no public capital in it.

We can say many things about Russia, but the fact remains that our neighbors have begun to take care of the future. This School will work both for business and for Russia, while oligarchs themselves act as both lecturers and students. I am convinced that, after this School is opened, this institution will become the original Russian outpost for “piping” global experience into the country.

I don’t see a similar level of social responsibility among businesses in Ukraine. Yes, Viktor Pinchuk has launched a scholarship program for talented students and Rynat Akhmetov finances research into the educational issues, but their efforts are not especially significant compared to, say, the Russian oligarchs and compared to what could be done in Ukraine.

A country threatened by conceptual chaos

As a result of all this, something that philosophers call a conceptual cataclysm has emerged in Ukraine. When people do not have clear-cut concepts of the ideal and the material worlds, they tend to confuse concepts or to simply not distinguish them at all. For example, Ukrainians often equate “knowledge” and “information” or “leftists” and

“conservatives,” although these are fundamentally different concepts.

In this looming conceptual chaos, it becomes less and less possible to govern the country because people are disoriented.

How can this situation be changed when Ukrainians essentially have no moral giants whom the country might emulate? When they have no landmark projects that might set the country’s future course? Thanks God, Ukraine got lucky with its people, an ironic and somewhat dispassionate lot. Ukrainian society is seeing movement although, so far, this movement is not being shaped by ideas but driven by chaotic feelings.

Business can begin to drive the country

Today, Ukraine has countless politicians, but not a single statesman. Who can, then, take responsibility for the country’s development? As a matter of fact, this can be done by the private sector. For example, all the largest corporations in the world have internal educational systems. Such powerful companies as General Motors and Motorola have their own universities.

Most large business structures contain a core that prepares elite managers both for the corporation and for the country. In Ukraine, business either is not thinking or does not know about this kind of possibility. We’re living in an atmosphere of self-reassurance—“We’ll survive this, too.” And so, we reflect neither on our own sickness nor on our place in the world.

Today, all Ukrainians need to understand: We are a young country and we have a chance to build that country that we want to live in, without the terrible baggage of the past borne by countries with a centuries-long history. We must take this chance: the window of opportunity is open—but not for long. ■

This is an abridged version of the article that appeared in Biznes №7 (734) 12 February 2007. You can view it online at <http://www.business.ua/i734/a23189> (in Russian). Biznes, one of the top Ukrainian weeklies, dedicates its Tribune section to the most interesting opinions, comments and ideas.

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